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Report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel

I. Introduction

1. In a letter dated 23 December 2013 (S/2013/759), the Security Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Office for West Africa (UNOWA) until 31 December 2016 and requested me to submit a report every six months on the implementation of its mandate. Following my letter to the Council dated 14 January 2016 (S/2016/88) on the strategic review of the Office of my Special Envoy for the Sahel, the Council requested me, on 28 January 2016, to proceed with the merger of the two offices into the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) and asked me to provide an update on the implementation of the mandate of UNOWAS in my next report (see S/2016/89). The present report covers the period from 1 January to 30 June 2016 and provides an overview of developments and trends in West Africa and the Sahel. It also outlines the activities of UNOWAS and the progress made in the implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel (S/2015/866).

II. Developments and trends in West Africa and the Sahel

2. Since my most recent report (S/2015/1012), several successful electoral processes and installations of new Governments have taken place in the subregion. At the same time, the continuing insecurity in the Lake Chad basin and northern Mali, coupled with the unprecedented terrorist attacks in Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire, raised alarms about the potential spread of terrorist activities to other countries of the subregion.

A. Political developments and trends

3. While elections in several countries were contested, they were generally assessed to be peaceful, credible and transparent. In Benin, the two-round presidential election of 6 and 20 March resulted in victory for Patrice Talon over the ruling coalition's candidate and former Prime Minister, Lionel Zinsou. Following a smooth handover of power, the new President appointed a 21-member Government on 6 April, which includes former presidential contenders and members of the rupture coalition. He also announced that he would seek to implement several

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political and constitutional reforms, including an amendment to the Constitution to provide for a single presidential term of seven years.

4. In Cabo Verde, the legislative elections held on 20 March were appraised as peaceful and credible. The opposition Movement for Democracy won an absolute majority of 53 per cent of the votes against the African Party for the Independence of Cabo Verde, which had held power since 2001. A new Government of 11 ministers, headed by the Prime Minister, José Ulisses Correia e Silva, took office on 22 April.

5. In the Niger, presidential and legislative elections were held on 21 February and 20 March, respectively. The campaign period was marred by controversies over voter identification and the legal status of the main opposition candidate, Hama Amadou, of the Mouvement démocratique nigérien pour une fédération africaine. Mr. Amadou was detained in November 2015 on charges of child trafficking. On 16 March, four days before election day, he was medically evacuated to France, where he remains as of the date of publication of the present report. In the first round, the incumbent President, Mahamadou Issoufou, garnered 48 per cent of the votes, while Mr. Amadou won 17 per cent. Subsequently, the opposition withdrew from the process, calling for a boycott of the second round. On 20 March, the President was re-elected with 92 per cent of the vote and was sworn into office on 2 April. On 12 April, he appointed a new Government, led by the Prime Minister, Brigi Rafini, composed mainly of members from the ruling Parti nigérien pour la démocratie et le socialisme (PNDS). The Party and its allies hold the majority (118) of the 171 seats in the National Assembly.

6. In Burkina Faso, the new Government, which was inaugurated on 6 January, immediately focused on enhancing the country's security, following a terrorist attack in Ouagadougou on 15 January. It also prioritized increasing its public revenues, addressing social unrest and restoring State authority in some parts of the country. On 16 March, a constitutional commission was established to review constitutional provisions on term limits and the powers of the executive and legislative bodies. Its findings will be submitted to a referendum later in 2016.

7. On 20 February, Côte d'Ivoire arrested and handed over three members of the former presidential guard to the authorities of Burkina Faso. On 28 April, the international arrest warrant issued in January by the Burkina Faso military justice tribunal against the Speaker of the National Assembly of Côte d'Ivoire, Guillaume Soro, in connection with his alleged involvement in the coup d'état of September 2015, was withdrawn on procedural grounds.

8. In Guinea, the appointment by the President, Alpha Condé, of a new Government on 4 January immediately drew criticism from the ruling Rassemblement du peuple de Guinée because only 4 of the 33 ministers were from the party. Preparations have begun for the holding of local and municipal elections. However, there are disagreements between the ruling party and the opposition over the scope and timetable of the elections, and the Independent National Electoral Commission has stated that the elections cannot technically be held before October. On 30 March, members of the follow-up committee on the political agreement of 20 August 2015 agreed to replace the committee with a broader-based framework for political dialogue. Meanwhile, there has been little progress in the drafting of bills for the reform of the electoral code and the Commission as agreed by the parties to the political agreement.

9. In Mauritania, the Government and the opposition failed to reach agreement on the conditions for the launch of the political dialogue process, prompting demonstrations in February and March by the opposition coalition Forum national pour la démocratie et l'unité. On 15 March, the President, Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, affirmed his readiness for dialogue during a press conference. The opposition suspended its cooperation, however, alleging that he intended to amend the Constitution and seek another term. Meanwhile, the country saw two Cabinet reshuffles, in February and April. In February, five ministers were relieved of their posts, including the Minister for Foreign Affairs. In April, four new ministers, including two women, were sworn in. On 3 May, the President called for consultations and a constitutional referendum on the proposal to remove the Senate.

10. In Nigeria, an active anti-corruption campaign was led by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission against the backdrop of a national budgetary and economic crisis linked to, among other things, falling global oil prices. Several high-profile figures were arrested or charged for corruption, including the former Minister of Defence, the former Chief of Defence Staff and other senior officers previously involved in national arms deals. The President of the Senate is also facing trial for allegedly making a false declaration and concealing assets. The Commission has also charged the former leader of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta with money-laundering, conspiracy and diversion of funds. In February, overturning an appeals court ruling, the Supreme Court confirmed the election of the governors of Akwa Ibom, Rivers and Taraba States. They are all candidates from the opposition People's Democratic Party. On 19 March, incidents of violence marred the rerun of senatorial elections in Rivers State.

11. Violence between cattle herders and farmers increased in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria, prompting the President, Muhammadu Buhari to deploy security forces to address the situation. Moreover, secessionist groups in the south-eastern states, such as the Indigenous People of Biafra and the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra, intensified their political activities, often triggering clashes with security forces.

12. Preparations for presidential elections in Ghana and the Gambia in November and December, respectively, are continuing. In Ghana, opposition parties continued to call for a new voters' register. A limited voter registration exercise was held from 28 April to 8 May. In the Gambia, the Independent Electoral Commission conducted a supplementary voter registration exercise from 14 January to 12 March. On 14 and 16 April, protests by members of the opposition calling for electoral reforms were violently suppressed by police and security forces. Several people, including the leader of the opposition United Democratic Party, Ousainou Darboe, were detained. There were subsequent reports that some detainees, who had not been seen since the time of their arrest, had been killed in State custody. To address these developments and other contentious issues relating to the elections, an inter-party committee held its first meeting on 20 April, after having been dormant for 10 years. Representatives of the United Nations, the European Union and the United States of America were present as observers. At the meeting, the ruling and opposition parties agreed to establish an ad hoc committee for dialogue, with the participation of civil society and security authorities, to address political tensions.

13. In Sierra Leone, the Constitutional Review Committee submitted draft recommendations in February. In mid-March, the President, Ernest Bai Koroma, decreed a major Cabinet reshuffle, during which six ministers were dismissed, six transferred to other ministries and six newly appointed. The suspension of the mayor of Koidu, considered to be a close ally of the former Vice-President, Samuel Sam-Sumana, also caused controversy.

14. In Senegal, on 20 March, voters approved by referendum 15 constitutional amendments, including 1 that would reduce the presidential term from seven to five years. The reduction will not affect the current mandate of the President, Macky Sall, which expires in 2019. The new provisions also established the secular nature of Senegal and granted oversight powers to the National Assembly.

15. In Togo, political, constitutional and institutional reforms have not advanced. However, a road map on decentralization and local elections has been adopted by the Government and is awaiting parliamentary review. The constitutional review process is continuing in Liberia and includes a contested proposal to declare Liberia a "Christian nation". The recommendations will be voted on through a referendum.

B. Security trends

16. There was a marked rise in criminal activities and terrorist attacks committed by groups operating across national borders in West Africa and the Sahel. The increase in criminal activities on the borders between the Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali, including hostage-takings and human, arms and drug smuggling, underscored the link between terrorist networks and illicit trafficking. Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb claimed responsibility for a terrorist attack in Ouagadougou on 15 January, in which 30 people died and 150 were wounded. It also took responsibility for a terrorist attack in Grand Bassam, Côte d'Ivoire, on 13 March, during which 19 people were killed and 30 wounded. In the Lake Chad basin, Boko Haram attacks in Nigeria, Cameroon and the Niger continued, while attacks on Chadian territory decreased. Since the beginning of the year, more than 30 attacks took place in the southern Diffa region of the Niger, causing the displacement of thousands of people and exacerbating an already difficult humanitarian situation in the country. The most notable attack took place on 3 June, when heavily armed Boko Haram elements attacked the Nigerien military headquarters in Bosso, killing 26 soldiers from the Niger and 2 soldiers from Nigeria and wounding many. The attack, widely publicized in Boko Haram's online propaganda, was the deadliest attack in the Niger since the beginning of the year. In the Middle Belt region of Nigeria, clashes between herders and farming communities at the end of February led to more than 300 deaths, the displacement of many and disruptions in harvesting. Following the issuance on 14 January of an arrest warrant for a former militant leader on corruption charges, attacks on oil pipelines and kidnappings increased in the Niger Delta, which is a major oil-producing region in Nigeria.

17. In Mali, terrorist and criminal activities have gradually expanded towards the central and southern parts of the country, including in Bamako, with attacks targeting Malian security forces, United Nations peacekeepers and French troops in Operation Barkhane. In the Tillabéri region of the Niger, criminal and jihadist groups have conducted more than 15 attacks since January, resulting in heavy civilian and military casualties.

18. Following the terrorist attacks in Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire in January and March, the Government of Senegal reinforced its border security and created, in January, an operations cell in Dakar focusing on terrorist threats. The country's security services have also carried out several preventive arrests and issued warnings to Senegalese jihadists returning from Libya and the Syrian Arab Republic. On 19 March, the President of Senegal, Macky Sall, in his capacity as Chair of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), called for increased regional cooperation to address the threats posed by terrorist networks. Similar calls were echoed during a meeting on 4 March in N'Djamena of the defence ministers of the Group of Five for the Sahel countries. The ministers affirmed their commitment to establishing a joint force for the Sahel.

19. The African Union has continued to explore options for the possible establishment of an intervention force in northern Mali. From 20 March to 1 April, it undertook a preliminary assessment visit to Mali as part of the process of conceptualizing and operationalizing the initiative. Meanwhile, the defence ministers of the Community of Sahelo-Saharan States, in a meeting held on 24 and 25 March in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, decided to establish joint border patrols and a regional counter-terrorism centre in Cairo.

20. Following a visit by the President of Liberia, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, to Guinea and Sierra Leone on 6 May, the Presidents of the three countries agreed to cooperate in the area of intelligence-sharing to combat terrorism in the region. On 13 May, at a ministerial-level meeting of the Mano River Union Joint Security Committee, held in Grand Bassam, Côte d'Ivoire, the participants adopted agreements aimed at strengthening collaboration on terrorism, maritime security and border security.

21. Across the region, there were several reports of drug seizures. In January, the Bolivian authorities seized a shipment of 8 tons of cocaine destined for Côte d'Ivoire, while the Spanish police intercepted a boat carrying 500 (kg) of cocaine near Cabo Verde. In Mauritania, the security forces seized 1.3 tons of marijuana in January. A further 280 kg of cocaine was seized from two foreign vessels by the Cabo Verdean authorities in April. In Nigeria, the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency dismantled a large-scale methamphetamine production facility in Delta State on 13 March. Meanwhile, incidents of maritime piracy have also increased, and the International Maritime Bureau has recorded at least six attacks and six attempted attacks in the Gulf of Guinea since January.

Counter-terrorism and Boko Haram violence

22. The security situation in the Lake Chad basin continues to be a source of concern, notwithstanding the military gains made along the Chadian-Nigerian border. A total of 78 Boko Haram attacks have been reported since January in Cameroon, Chad, the Niger and Nigeria, resulting in some 700 deaths, compared with 1,200 during the same period in 2015. Kano, Jigawa and Bauchi States in Nigeria have been largely spared from attacks, which represents a positive change from 2015. Meanwhile, Borno and Yobe States have endured multiple raids and suicide bombings targeting villages and military positions. On 20 April, the convoy of the officer commanding the seventh division was ambushed on the road from Maiduguri to Bama.

23. The rise in the number of attacks against returnees and internally displaced persons in camps in Borno State has affected national plans for resettlement and the

launching of rehabilitation efforts. In a series of raids on the village of Dalori, 10 km from Maiduguri, 105 civilians were killed in January. The attackers also attempted to raid a nearby camp hosting 25,000 displaced persons, but were repelled by the army. On 9 February, 56 people were killed and 80 injured in a double suicide bombing at a camp for the displaced in Dikwa.

24. Since January, operations by the Multinational Joint Task Force and the Nigerian military have resulted in the rescue of more than 2,300 abductees, mostly in Borno State, and the arrest of key members of Boko Haram, including the leader of its offspring sect, Ansarul Muslimina Fi Biladis Sudan. In addition, the Task Force and the Nigerian armed forces have significantly reduced the capacity of Boko Haram to conduct major operations by severing several of its major supply routes.

25. In the Niger, the southern region of Diffa has been the target of recurrent attacks by Boko Haram, especially on military convoys and outposts. The Bosso and Nguigmi regions have also been the target of suicide bombings and improvised explosive device attacks, showing the continuous pressure exercised by Boko Haram on the northern shore of Lake Chad.

26. With enhanced intelligence-sharing and continuous support from partners, the Multinational Joint Task Force has achieved progress under a unified command. In February, Nigerian and Cameroonian troops conducted joint operations that destroyed Boko Haram hideouts along the border. In April, an intelligence fusion cell similar to that established in Abuja in 2014 was established at Task Force headquarters in N'Djamena to enhance the conduct of joint operations. In May, Benin deployed 150 of the 450 troops pledged to join the Task Force. On 3 May, the President of Cameroon, Paul Biya, visited Nigeria, where he reaffirmed his determination to root out Boko Haram.

C. Socioeconomic trends

27. Despite security challenges, the lingering impact of the Ebola virus disease outbreak and a fragile economic environment, West Africa sustained a growth rate of 4.2 per cent in 2015. The rate is expected to increase to 6.2 per cent in 2016, according to figures released in February by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat. Inflation is projected to remain low in the countries of the West African Economic and Monetary Union, but may reach 12.5 per cent in Ghana owing to the depreciation of the national currency. Nigeria is also facing significant challenges stemming from shortfalls in oil revenue, a deterioration in the finances of state and local governments and disruptions in private sector activities caused by a lack of access to foreign exchange. While import-dependent countries have benefited from the drop in oil prices, low commodity prices have had a heavy impact on countries exporting raw materials.

28. In Mauritania, the severe drop in the price of iron ore has had a serious impact on State revenue, while shipments of iron ore from Sierra Leone have resumed. Agricultural production and exports in Côte d'Ivoire have registered growth as a result of government policies to diversify the economy. Meanwhile, trade between the Gambia and Senegal has been negatively affected since February, following the closure of the border in response to a significant increase in tariffs levied by the

Gambia on commercial trucks. This resulted in a reduced supply of basic commodities and a significant increase in prices on both sides of the border.

D. Humanitarian trends

29. The humanitarian situation in West Africa and the Sahel continues to be affected by chronic food insecurity and malnutrition. Recent post-harvest surveys reveal that malnutrition rates in Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, the Niger and Nigeria could worsen further during the lean season. Across the Sahel, 4.5 million people remain displaced, 6 million people need emergency food assistance and some 5.9 million children under 5 years of age are expected to suffer from acute malnutrition in 2016. To provide assistance, the United Nations has appealed for $1.98 billion in 2016, of which only 11 per cent has been received.

30. Across the Lake Chad basin, at least 2.4 million displaced persons, a majority of whom are women and children, are exposed to the risk of exploitation and abuse. Overall, 7 million people in north-east Nigeria and almost 500,000 in the Diffa region of the Niger are estimated to be in need of assistance. Meanwhile, efforts for resettlement and recovery are continuing. There are also indications of a food crisis looming in north-east Nigeria, owing to the disruption in farming and herding activities. According to preliminary findings from a joint United Nations assessment of the situation in Borno and Yobe States, in north-east Nigeria, carried out in April, an estimated 800,000 people are in need of urgent food assistance, while 350,000 children suffer from severe malnutrition. Also in Nigeria, communal violence on 28 February between herders and farming communities in Benue State reportedly resulted in the displacement of thousands of civilians.

31. On 15 March, the Nigerian Senate approved the allocation of $50 million for the relocation, rehabilitation and resettlement of displaced people in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe States. In April, the European Union allocated €67 million euros for the rehabilitation and reintegration of captured Boko Haram elements. On 19 April, the United States announced the provision of $40 million for humanitarian assistance to countries affected by Boko Haram. Meanwhile, the Nigerian Presidential Committee on the North-East continues to oversee and coordinate the implementation of national initiatives such as the Presidential Initiative for the North-East, the Victim Support Fund and the Safe Schools Initiative. Efforts to harmonize the activities of the National Emergency Management Commission and the National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and Internally Displaced Persons continued with the support of bilateral and multilateral donors.

32. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) recorded monthly migration movements of some 10,000 to 12,000 people leaving the Niger towards countries of the Maghreb since the beginning of 2016. It also recorded an average of 2,000 to 3,000 migrants returning to the Niger from those destinations. In April, movements towards Libya and Algeria surged, with close to 11,000 people reportedly transiting through the Niger between 19 to 25 April. Those involved in outgoing journeys towards Libya and Algeria were mostly from the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, the Niger, Nigeria and Senegal, while returning migrants were mostly from Mali and the Niger. IOM established a presence in Agadez, the Niger, in February to improve the monitoring of incoming and outgoing movements. From 9 to 11 February, a meeting was held in Accra under the framework of European

Union-ECOWAS cooperation on the implementation of the Valletta Action Plan, during which ECOWAS pledged to tackle migration through investment in livelihoods in rural areas.

33. On 17 March, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the end of the Ebola epidemic in West Africa. On the same day, however, a new transmission was registered in Nzérékoré, Guinea. Another case was recorded in Monrovia on 1 April. This triggered the closure of the Liberian border with Guinea and restrictions along the Sierra Leonean border with Guinea. On 29 March, WHO announced that the outbreak no longer constituted a public health emergency and called for the lifting of all travel and trade restrictions. Some countries, including Ghana and Togo, are also working to contain outbreaks of meningitis. Cases of cholera have also been reported in Nigeria, while Benin, Nigeria and Togo have reported outbreaks of Lassa fever.

E. Trends on human rights

34. The overall human rights situation in West Africa and the Sahel remains a source of concern, especially in the context of continuing attacks perpetrated by Boko Haram and other terrorist groups. In Burkina Faso, on 22 March, the President, Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, inaugurated the High Council for Reconciliation and National Unity, which will examine human rights violations committed by State authorities between 1960 and 2015. On 26 March, the National Assembly adopted a law on the creation of a new national human rights commission. In Togo, on 11 March, the National Assembly adopted a bill on the composition and functioning of the National Human Rights Commission.

35. In Mauritania, on 3 March, the Council of Ministers adopted a law on gender-based violence and established a national anti-slavery day on 6 March. On 14 March, however, security forces used tear gas against a demonstration by the Initiative pour la résurgence du mouvement abolitioniste calling for the release of its imprisoned leader, Biram Dah Abeid. On 17 May, the Supreme Court ordered his release. On 4 March, during my visit to Mauritania, I urged the authorities to uphold human rights, including through legislative instruments, and to ensure that security forces abided by those principles.

36. In Guinea, the nomination in February of General Mathurin Bangoura as the new governor of Conakry led to negative reactions from victims and human rights defenders, given his indictment in June 2015 for involvement in the massacre carried out at the city's stadium on 28 September 2009. On 16 and 17 April, during a joint visit to the country with the United States Under-Secretary of State, Sarah Sewall, my Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict encouraged the authorities to accelerate the judicial process relating to the events of September 2009 to ensure justice for the victims.

37. Following the violent suppression of peaceful demonstrations on 14 and 16 April in the Gambia, I called for an independent investigation into the events, including the alleged death and torture of opposition members while in State custody. ECOWAS, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights also called for an independent investigation. In response, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement in which it requested foreign countries to desist from interfering in the

national affairs of the Gambia. The United Democratic Party leader, Ousainou Darboe, and at least 19 fellow party members who were arrested while participating in the demonstrations have been charged with seven criminal offences, comprising intent to breach the peace and provoke others to do the same; rioting and assembling without a permit; incitement of violence; riotously interfering with vehicles; holding a procession without a permit; disobeying an order to disperse from an unlawful procession; and conspiracy. To date, 13 detainees, including 6 women, have reportedly been released on bail. At least 19 remain in detention, however. On 14 May, the United Democratic Party issued a press release in which it outlined allegations of human rights violations committed by the Government and expressed concern about how the court proceedings were being conducted. It called for the immediate and unconditional release of the detainees and for an investigation into the alleged death of the party member and into reports of torture. It also called upon security forces to stop preventing peaceful demonstrations and to ensure the security of party officials and members. Meanwhile, the trial of the executive director of the Teranga FM radio station, Alagie Ceesay, charged in August 2015 with seven criminal offences, including sedition, continued. On 22 April, he reportedly disappeared from a hospital to which he had been admitted for medical care. His whereabouts remain unknown. During a recent tour of the country, the President was quoted as making divisive and hateful remarks about a particular ethnic group, raising serious concerns.

38. In Nigeria, in April, two years after the abduction of more than 270 schoolgirls in Chibok on 14 April 2014, a video surfaced that showed 15 of the abductees alive. The Minister of Information subsequently confirmed that negotiations were continuing with Boko Haram for the girls' release. Meanwhile, allegations of illegal detention and abuse by the military against Shia demonstrators in Kaduna State in December 2015 have emerged and prompted a national inquiry. On 21 April, a human rights lawyer filed a case with the ECOWAS Court of Justice against the Government of Nigeria for not preventing the killings, rapes and maiming perpetrated by herders against farmers. The Nigerian armed forces, with United Nations support, adopted a code of conduct on 13 March for the protection of human rights. They have also established a human rights desk, composed of six legal officers from the Nigerian Bar Association and the legal section of the army.

F. Trends on gender issues

39. Regional efforts to ensure gender mainstreaming and the inclusion of women in political and electoral processes have progressed. Of the 29 ministers in the new Government in Burkina Faso, 7 are women; of the 36 ministers in Côte d'Ivoire, 9 are women; and, of the 12 ministers in Cabo Verde, 4 are women. In Guinea's new Government, women hold the key portfolios of economy and finance, foreign affairs, agriculture, public works, and planning and international cooperation. In the Niger, the national action plan on Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and subsequent resolutions was validated in February. The Government also established a national observatory for gender promotion. However, the number of female ministers in the new Government does not comply with the legal provision of a 25 per cent minimum, which has prompted protests by women's associations. A new labour code in Côte d'Ivoire includes provisions against moral and sexual

harassment. In Sierra Leone, the President refused to sign the Safe Abortion Act, which was passed by the Parliament in December 2015.

III. Activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel

Merger of the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Sahel and the United Nations Office for West Africa

40. A strategic review of the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Sahel was conducted by the Department of Political Affairs of the Secretariat from October to December 2015. The purpose of the review was to determine whether adjustments were required to the objectives and institutional design of the Office. On 14 January, I presented the findings of the review to the Security Council, indicating my intention to initiate a "light merger" of the Office of the Special Envoy and UNOWA, whereby existing capacity to support the integrated strategy would remain largely unchanged, except for its reporting line through my Special Representative for West Africa and Head of UNOWA (see S/2016/88). On 28 January, the Council requested me to proceed with the merger with a view to maximizing synergies by ensuring a unified management and structure of UNOWAS (see S/2016/89). My Special Representative for West Africa, Mohamed Ibn Chambas, has since assumed the function of my Special Representative for West Africa and the Sahel, while my former Special Envoy for the Sahel, Hiroute Guebre Sellassie, has assumed the function of my Deputy Special Representative and Deputy Head of UNOWAS. I have also established a liaison cell in Nouakchott to strengthen United Nations engagement with the secretariat of the Group of Five for the Sahel, and a new coordination and regional partnerships section within UNOWAS, while maintaining overall staffing levels with no additional budgetary cost. The newly reconfigured office will build upon the existing mandates of UNOWA and the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Sahel, including by continuing to exercise its good offices and to implement the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel.

41. From 25 May to 2 June, my Special Representative for West Africa and the Sahel undertook a tour of Group of Five for the Sahel countries during which he met with the Group's permanent secretariat, the Presidents of Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania and the Niger, the Prime Minister of Chad and other senior government representatives. During his consultations, my Special Representative provided an update on the implementation of the merger of UNOWA and the Office of my Special Envoy and reaffirmed the continuing support of the United Nations for the multidimensional challenges faced by the countries of the Group. In his meeting with diplomatic and other partners, he advocated for a holistic approach in line with the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel, taking into account the nexus between peace, security and development.

Good offices and special assignments

42. My Special Representative conducted several visits to the Niger in the run-up to the elections in February to build consensus on the voters' list. He met the main

contenders before the release of the provisional results, following the first round, in coordination with ECOWAS, the West African Economic and Monetary Union, the African Union, the International Organization of la Francophonie and the Community of Sahelo-Saharan States. Before the run-off, he advised the parties to resume political dialogue through the established mechanisms. With the support of extrabudgetary funding, UNOWAS also dispatched a technical team, comprising political and human rights officers, to support his good offices throughout the electoral process.

43. In Benin, my Special Representative met the presidential candidates, political parties and electoral management bodies ahead of the first round of elections on 6 March, with the aim of resolving outstanding issues relating to voter cards. From 22 to 24 March, following the release of provisional results, he met the President-elect, Patrice Talon, the outgoing Prime Minister, Lionel Zinsou, and relevant national institutions to, among others, commend them for the successful conduct of the polls and the democratic spirit displayed by both candidates and voters.

44. In Guinea, my Special Representative conducted two missions to resolve differences between the political leaders and support the momentum towards the holding of local elections. Following the discontinuation in March of the follow-up committee on the political agreement of 20 August 2015, he also advocated the prompt establishment of a new broad-based forum in which to address contentious issues and debate legal and institutional reforms for adoption by the National Assembly.

45. On 2 and 3 March, I visited Burkina Faso, where I commended the President for his efforts to reform the security services and for his plans to promote a national reconciliation process. I reiterated my commitment to mobilizing the international community in support of national efforts to promote sustainable development. Further to the President's request for support to reform the armed forces and security apparatus, my Special Representative travelled with my Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support to Ouagadougou on 18 March to further identify areas for United Nations support for security sector reform, national reconciliation, justice and the rule of law. On 1 April, my Special Representative, the President of the ECOWAS Commission and the African Union Commissioner for Peace and Security co-chaired in Ouagadougou the fifth meeting of the International Follow-up and Support Group for the Transition in Burkina Faso, which they agreed to rename the International Support Group for the Consolidation of Democracy and Economic Recovery in Burkina Faso.

46. On 4 and 5 March, I visited Mauritania and met the President, Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, and the Prime Minister, Yahya Ould Hademine, to discuss collaboration among Sahelian countries on development and regional security issues. We also discussed national efforts in promoting political dialogue, social cohesion and human rights. I welcomed the Government's commitment to addressing slavery and its aftermath, together with other commitments relating to the elimination of torture. I also welcomed the country's efforts to strengthen its democracy, while urging the authorities to forge solutions to the many challenges facing the Sahel, through the Group of Five for the Sahel and the African Union.

47. On 22 and 23 April, during a visit of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate to Ouagadougou, the national authorities requested assistance in the drafting of a counter-terrorism strategy and support to enhance counter-

terrorism coordination efforts. The Executive Directorate also visited Ghana from 20 to 22 April to assess the country's preparedness to prevent and respond to terrorist incidents, as well as to advise the authorities on the development of a comprehensive counter-terrorism strategy.

Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission

48. Insecurity in the northern Cameroon-Nigeria border areas as a result of Boko Haram-related violence continued to pose a challenge to efforts to expedite the completion of the work of the Commission, including the remaining demarcation work. As Chair of the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission, my Special Representative held consultations in Yaoundé and Abuja in February and March with the heads of the Cameroonian and Nigerian delegations to the Commission, Cabinet members and national border commissions to agree on priorities and modalities to be employed in completing the border demarcation. The third phase of pillar emplacement was finalized in March, with 238 pillars added, bringing the number of posts erected to 903 of a total of 2,969 for the entire border. The emplacement project was accompanied by a review of socioeconomic projects to benefit the affected border communities. The review's outcome was transmitted to the Minister of Finance of Cameroon on 8 March. Feasibility studies on activities to be undertaken with Nigerian counterparts are also being conducted.

Enhancing subregional capacity to address cross-border and cross-cutting threats to peace and security

Security sector reform

49. From 27 to 31 March, UNOWAS, with the support of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations of the Secretariat, conducted a visit to the ECOWAS Commission to extend support for the adoption and implementation of its Regional Framework for Security Sector Reform and Governance and to promote a coordinated security sector reform approach in the region. Other areas of cooperation were also discussed, including the conduct of joint assessment and support missions and joint advocacy to and training for key government entities and the leaders of armed forces.

50. In Guinea, the United Nations Senior Security Sector Reform Adviser continued to support national stakeholders in advancing reform efforts, including through the development of legal texts and the implementation of decisions in the defence and police sectors. He is also supporting the inclusion of a security sector reform steering committee in the Supreme Defence Council.

Strategy for cross-border security in the Mano River Union

51. From 25 to 27 January, UNOWAS and the Mano River Union held a technical meeting at the Union's secretariat, in Freetown, to develop a joint workplan on resuming the implementation of the strategy for cross-border security in the Union. Implementation of the strategy had been put on hold following the Ebola outbreak. My Special Representative and the Union Secretary-General endorsed the workplan during a meeting held in Dakar on 29 April. On 12 and 13 May, UNOWAS provided technical assistance to a meeting of Union countries, before the Joint Security Committee meeting held on 14 May in Grand Bassam, Côte d'Ivoire.

Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea

52. From 14 to 30 March, 30 countries from West and Southern Africa and Europe took part in a naval exercise in the Gulf of Guinea aimed at enhancing interoperational capabilities and regional cooperation. During the reporting period, 15 piracy incidents off the Nigerian coast and in the Niger Delta were recorded.

53. Some progress was made towards the implementation of the decisions adopted in Yaoundé in June 2013 on maritime safety and security in the Gulf of Guinea. On 12 February, my Special Representatives for Central Africa and for West Africa and the Sahel attended an extraordinary meeting between the heads of the Economic Community of Central African States, ECOWAS and the Gulf of Guinea Commission. The participants pledged to operationalize the Interregional Coordination Centre for Maritime Safety and Security in the Gulf of Guinea by 1 July in Yaoundé, to coincide with the inauguration of the Regional Centre for Maritime Security in West Africa, to be located in Abidjan. The headquarters for zone E, which will cover Benin, the Niger, Nigeria and Togo, and be based in Cotonou, Benin, continues to be constrained by financial limitations. My Special Representative is undertaking fundraising efforts for the establishment in Ghana of the headquarters for zone F, which comprises Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Liberia and Sierra Leone. He is also supporting efforts by ECOWAS to identify a host for the headquarters for zone G, which comprises Cabo Verde, the Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali and Senegal. ECOWAS is currently recruiting leadership staff for the Interregional Coordination Centre.

Drug trafficking and transnational organized crime

54. Within the framework of the West Africa Coast Initiative, in February, my Special Representative for West Africa and the Sahel and the Regional Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) agreed to combine efforts to accelerate the establishment of a transnational crime unit in Guinea. They have approached development partners, including the European Union, France, Spain, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States for support for the unit.

Implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel

55. In implementing the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel, UNOWAS continued to focus on mobilizing and coordinating international support for the Sahel, supporting regional cooperation efforts and coordinating United Nations activities in support of the Sahel.

56. UNOWAS continued to provide funding for the development of programmes under the Ministerial Coordination Platform for the Sahel. It also continued to co-chair regular sessions of the technical secretariat of the Platform and supported the Platform's four thematic groups on the areas of governance, security, resilience and development. UNOWAS also engaged with potential donor countries to support resource mobilization efforts by funds, programmes and specialized agencies of the United Nations system and to accelerate the implementation of regional programmes.

57. UNOWAS strengthened its cooperation with the Group of Five for the Sahel. On 25 March, the Office established a liaison cell in Nouakchott, following

consultations with the Group of Five for the Sahel permanent secretariat and key partners. UNOWAS deployed specialists to help the permanent secretariat establish a cell on the prevention of radicalization and to develop a plan of action to operationalize the declaration of the Group of Five for the Sahel on efforts to combat radicalization and violent extremism in the Sahel, adopted in Niamey on 14 May 2015. The permanent secretariat has requested support in other areas, which is currently under review.

58. Cooperation was also strengthened at the headquarters level. The Secretariat convened four meetings with the permanent representatives of the Group of Five for the Sahel countries to the United Nations in New York to discuss the merger between UNOWA and the Office of my Special Envoy for the Sahel and the evaluation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel, in accordance with the Security Council's request (see S/PRST/2015/24).

59. UNOWAS continued to provide technical support to other United Nations entities for the development of regional projects. A total of 19 regional projects are at various stages of development or implementation within the governance, security and resilience pillars of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel. These include nine flagship projects developed jointly with the Group of Five for the Sahel permanent secretariat. Under the governance pillar, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Group of Five for the Sahel and the Government of Mali organized a conference on 10 and 11 March on border management and border communities in the Sahel. Attended by 150 participants, the conference examined how to enhance the participation of border communities, particularly women and young people, in stabilization and security initiatives. A follow-up meeting between the Group of Five for the Sahel Permanent Secretary, regional directors and representatives of United Nations entities to review the outcome of the meeting within the larger framework of the integrated strategy was held on 25 March in Dakar.

60. Under the security pillar, UNODC continued to provide assistance to establish the legal and institutional framework for cooperation on security and defence between the Group of Five for the Sahel States, including the Security Cooperation Platform. The UNODC Sahel Programme has focused on efforts to combat corruption and trafficking in persons and on firearms control and border management. The Programme implemented more than 190 activities in the region, reaching 6,000 beneficiaries since January 2014. In December 2015, with legal expertise provided by UNODC, Burkina Faso adopted an updated counter-terrorism law that addresses foreign terrorist fighters. Since January, numerous seizures have been made by the Joint Port Control Unit of the Dakar seaport, with counterfeit medicine to the value of over $380,000 seized aboard four containers and 18 stolen vehicles intercepted in Dakar. During the UNODC Sahel Programme steering committee meeting held in Dakar in April, representatives of the Group of Five for the Sahel, Sahel and Maghreb countries agreed to focus on foreign terrorist fighters, the treatment of children associated with terrorist groups, wildlife and forest offences, trafficking in cultural property, trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants.

61. Under its regional project on coordinated border management in Mali, the Niger, Mauritania and Burkina Faso, IOM supported the development of joint border protocols. The flagship project on harnessing the future of the Sahel through

the demographic dividend, which is aimed at reducing child mortality and enhancing gender equality, was officially launched in Niamey on 2 November 2015, under the resilience pillar. The Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO) continued to provide technical support to Group of Five for the Sahel countries for the formulation of national resilience priorities. FAO is also coordinating a project on information management, risk and vulnerability analysis and resilience measurement in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, the Niger and Senegal.

62. In the presidential statement of 8 December 2015 (S/PRST/2015/24), the Security Council requested the United Nations to support Sahelian countries in their efforts to counter terrorism and address conditions conducive to the spread of violent extremism. In this regard, the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force has initiated plans to explore modalities to expand its Integrated Assistance for Countering Terrorism initiative to all the member countries of the Group of Five for the Sahel, to complement the initiative implemented in Mali. In April, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate also held consultations with Burkina Faso to reaffirm the Committee's continued support for counter-terrorism activities of States in West Africa and the Sahel and to promote regional cooperation.

63. In the same presidential statement, the Security Council also requested me to include in my next report detailed information on the financial contributions towards boosting economic growth and eradicating poverty, through projects that would support peace and security efforts in the Sahel. The process of gathering data on these aspects is continuing, and I will present my findings in my next report on West Africa and the Sahel, which is due in December.

64. The Secretariat, in consultation with Member States, other United Nations entities and relevant stakeholders, initiated the process for the evaluation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel.

Promotion of good governance, respect for the rule of law, human rights and gender mainstreaming

65. On 6 April, UNOWAS participated in the fifty-eighth session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, during which country-specific human rights issues were discussed. On 8 March, in partnership with United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNOWAS organized a conference on the role of women in the promotion of peace and development. In line with efforts to support civil society in the areas of human rights and governance, UNOWAS participated in the regional non-governmental organizations meeting held in Banjul from 3 to 5 April, during which discussions focused on Security Council resolution 2250 (2015) on youth, peace and security and efforts to combat impunity. On 29 March, UNOWAS organized a consultative meeting with civil society, youth organizations, United Nations entities and academic experts on the theme of social exclusion. At the meeting, participants discussed youth marginalization, slavery and other related issues and called upon national Governments to fully implement the Abidjan Declaration of Ministers of ECOWAS Member States on Eradication of Statelessness, adopted in 2015.

66. In April and May, UNOWAS held discussions with ECOWAS with a view to developing joint gender advocacy initiatives. With the support of the United Nations

Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and UNDP, the Working Group on Women, Peace and Security in West Africa held two thematic exchanges with women leaders in the region to enhance their involvement in the prevention of violent extremism. In April and June, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) contributed to the organization of two thematic exchanges between the Working Group and UNOWAS on extremism and on women's participation in public life.

Inter-institutional cooperation

United Nations inter-institutional cooperation

67. From 11 to 20 February, UNOWAS participated in the strategic review of the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire, in preparation for the drawdown of the mission in 2017. The strategic review highlighted the need to advance national reconciliation and justice processes, enhance national capacity for small arms control and resolve outstanding issues pertaining to the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of combatants. The strategic review noted that continuous instability at the Ivorian border areas with Burkina Faso, Mali and Liberia required consistent cooperation between national security services and regional organizations. In March, my Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support travelled to Côte d'Ivoire to identify areas for programmatic support to help to address drivers of conflict, including through cross-border initiatives.

68. From 4 to 6 April, my Special Representative dispatched a joint technical mission by UNOWAS, OHCHR, UNDP and the Department of Safety and Security of the Secretariat to the Gambia to assess the situation ahead of the presidential elections of December 2016. The mission met the electoral management bodies, the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the justice authorities, civil society and diplomatic partners.

69. On 20 May, my Special Representative hosted the high-level meeting of heads of West Africa-based United Nations peace missions, held in Dakar. The participants discussed, among others, the progress made in democratic transitions in West Africa and the impact of environmental degradation on countries in West Africa and the Sahel. They agreed to continue to cooperate closely and share information on key issues affecting the subregion.

Cooperation with regional and subregional partners

70. From 12 to 19 February, my Special Representatives for Central Africa and for West Africa and the Sahel conducted their third joint tour to the Boko Haram-affected countries of Cameroon, Chad and Nigeria to assess progress made in the regional response. They discussed United Nations support in a number of areas, including communications and outreach and reintegration. They also discussed the humanitarian and human rights situation.

71. On 14 May, my Special Representative attended the second Regional Security Summit, held in Abuja. The Presidents of Benin, Cameroon, Chad, France, Gabon, the Niger, Senegal and Togo, the Prime Minister of Equatorial Guinea, the United Kingdom Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the United States Deputy Secretary of State and African Union and European Union

representatives attended the meeting. The participants acknowledged the progress made by the Multinational Joint Task Force and committed themselves to further strengthening cooperation in response to the crisis. Partners pledged support to efforts to combat Boko Haram and to rehabilitation efforts. The European Union announced a contribution of €50 million for the Task Force, while the United Kingdom announced bilateral support to Nigeria in the amount of £40 million.

72. On 27 and 28 January, UNOWAS and ECOWAS held a joint working session in Abuja to assess developments in the subregion and identify joint activities, such as support for security sector reform in Burkina Faso, Guinea and Guinea-Bissau, the implementation of the Declaration of the Heads of State and Government of Central and West African States on Maritime Safety and Security in Their Common Maritime Domain and joint initiatives for mediation.

73. As referred to above, UNOWAS strengthened its cooperation with the Group of Five for the Sahel permanent secretariat and with the Group's member countries (see paras. 55 to 57).

IV. Observations and recommendations

74. While marred by the terrorist attacks in Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire and the continued violence in the Lake Chad basin and in Mali, the overall situation in the region has generally been positive. I am encouraged by the successful holding of peaceful and credible elections and the smooth democratic transitions in several West African countries. I am hopeful that this trend will continue. I encourage countries of the region, including Guinea, Mauritania and the Niger, to engage in political dialogue with the opposition in the spirit of tolerance, openness and inclusivity. The continuing collaboration, including the good offices missions jointly carried out, by the United Nations, the African Union and ECOWAS will continue to be instrumental in facilitating inclusive dialogue, promoting democratic principles and preventing the escalation of tensions in countries of the subregion.

75. I reiterate my call upon the Government of the Gambia to conduct an independent investigation to shed full light on the events of 14 and 16 April, including with respect to the allegations of torture and deaths of detainees while in State custody. I also urge the Government to follow due process in the prosecution of those detained. I encourage the Gambian authorities to allow their citizens to exercise their freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, as enshrined in the country's Constitution. I am encouraged by the resumption of political dialogue through the reactivated inter-party committee and urge the Government to create a conducive environment that will allow for peaceful, credible and transparent elections in December.

76. I am deeply concerned by the unprecedented terrorist attacks that have taken place in some countries in West Africa that were not previously affected. I welcome the leadership demonstrated by countries in West Africa and the Sahel in spearheading initiatives to tackle security challenges in the region. I encourage further collaboration between the Member States concerned and relevant regional organizations, with United Nations support, to address the underlying drivers of conflict relating to development, social exclusion and challenges to good governance. UNOWAS will continue its partnership and collaboration with the subregion to address these challenges holistically.

77. I reiterate the United Nations dedication to ensuring the implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel, in close collaboration with Member States, regional organizations, including the Group of Five for the Sahel, and other relevant stakeholders. In this regard, I established an UNOWAS Liaison Office in Nouakchott to help deepen the United Nations collaboration with the Group and to identify opportunities for joint initiatives in support of countries of the region to address the drivers of instability. The United Nations-Group of Five for the Sahel road map will also provide a comprehensive framework for strengthened collaboration between the two entities in areas of common interest, including in support of the implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel.

78. I commend the renewed efforts made by Benin, Cameroon, Chad, the Niger and Nigeria in the operationalization of the Multinational Joint Task Force to address the threat of Boko Haram and reiterate my call for all counter-insurgency efforts to be conducted in full compliance with international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law. I welcome the assistance provided by regional and international partners in support of these efforts and encourage them to increase their support to boost the region's action, including activities that seek to address the underlying root causes that led to the emergence of Boko Haram. I am concerned about the significant humanitarian needs and I encourage donors to support the humanitarian response in the Lake Chad basin region, which remains critically underfunded. This will help to alleviate the plight of the internally displaced, refugee and returnee populations in all affected countries.

79. I commend the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission for its continued efforts to implement the judgment of the International Court of Justice of 10 October 2002. I am encouraged by the continued collaboration between the Governments of Cameroon and Nigeria to ensure the completion of the border demarcation and provide confidence-building measures to the affected border communities. My Special Representative will continue to provide his good offices to help to resolve any outstanding issues and assist the two parties in mobilizing resources.

80. In conclusion, I wish to express my deep appreciation to the Governments of West Africa and the Sahel region, the ECOWAS Commission, the African Union, the Lake Chad Basin Commission, the Mano River Union and the Group of Five for the Sahel for their continued cooperation with UNOWAS. I also extend my gratitude to all entities of the United Nations system in West Africa and the Sahel, civil society organizations and other institutions for their close partnership with UNOWAS in the implementation of its mandate. I express particular appreciation to my Special Representative, Mohamed Ibn Chambas, and the staff of UNOWAS and the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission for their efforts to advance peace and security in West Africa and the Sahel.